

From the office of:

D. Young Pham, DDS
1415 Ridgeback Rd Ste 23
Chula Vista, CA 91910-6990
(619) 421-2155

Potential Piercing Problems

An oral piercing can cause pain, swelling, infection, drooling, taste loss, scarring, chipped teeth, and tooth loss. Most dentists discourage oral piercing because of the many health risks involved. If you're thinking about getting an oral piercing, consider the following information.

What should I know before I get a piercing?

Piercing regulations vary by state, so it is important to do research to find a piercer who is prepared to answer any and all questions that you may have. Be sure to ask that person about proper piercing care, possible side effects, and anything else that might concern you. If this person does not answer your questions in a clear, professional manner, go somewhere else.

What problems can piercings cause?

Fractured teeth are a common problem for people with an oral piercing. They can chip their teeth on the piercing while eating, sleeping, or talking, or by chewing on the jewelry. The fracture may go deep into the tooth, which could require a root canal or an extraction.

Additionally, excessive rubbing by oral piercing jewelry can cause the gums to recede, which can cause tooth sensitivity and, in untreated cases, tooth loss.

Are there more serious complications?

It is not unusual for the tongue to swell after being punctured, but in some cases it may swell so much that it can cut off breathing. In rare cases, doctors may pass a breathing tube through a patient's nose until the swelling subsides.

Your mouth contains high levels of bacteria, and that bacteria can enter your bloodstream through the oral piercing, causing an infection in your heart or other life-threatening health problems. See your dentist at the first sign of *any* infection.

There is also a risk of contracting infections such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis, and methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). To prevent the spread of serious infections, the piercer should use a fresh needle for every piercing, and sterilize all needles and instruments in an autoclave, which uses extreme heat for sanitization.



Some people can have allergic reactions to certain materials used in piercings, which can lead to further complications. Make sure that the piercer uses the right kind of metal, such as surgical-grade stainless steel.

How do I take care of my piercing?

It will take several weeks for an oral piercing to heal. Once it's healed, use antiseptic mouthwash after every meal and brush the jewelry in the same way you would your teeth. After your tongue heals, take the piercing out every night and brush it to remove any unseen plaque. Consider removing the piercing before eating, sleeping, or strenuous activity.

If you have more questions about oral piercings, talk to your general dentist.



KnowYourTeeth.com

Brought to you by the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD), this website answers important dental health questions, offers the latest information on current treatments, provides tips for first-rate oral hygiene, and helps visitors find highly qualified general dentists near where they live.

The AGD is a member of the Partnership for Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives, a first-of-its-kind national dental coalition composed of 37 leading dental health organizations. Look for more information about the Kids' Healthy Mouths campaign at www.2min2x.org.

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